Wollison-Shipton

Historic Office Building

One Hundred Fifty North Street
Pittsfield Massachusetts

In the process of researching my family history years ago the name Charles D. Beebe appeared and subsequently his relation to a Carrie Wollison (this subject will be covered in subsequent features I hope to write). These names were both familiar to me from my life experiences and history research. The Wollison building has always been of interest to me since my childhood. With the recent sale and purchase of the building much of its history has been published in the Berkshire Eagle and the Berkshire Trade and Commerce publication, who supplied me the real estate marketing brochure which I have edited, corrected and made additions. In researching this article I find that the Wollisons were neighbors of my ancestors for 2 generations and undoubtedly knew each other. Enjoy!

History of the Wollison-Shipton Building

The story of the Wollison-Shipton Building really begins over 200 years ago, when Abner Stevens moves his drum building operations from Hancock Massachusetts to North Street in Pittsfield around 1809. Abner's reputation for fine instruments spread quickly throughout the young United States at a time when most towns maintained a militia including fife and drum players. In addition to local musicians, larger military operations carried approximately 2 fifers and 2 drummers for each 100 men in a company. The onset of the War Of 1812 brought a tremendous demand for Abner Stevens' drums from both the US military plus municipalities in most states and he soon found himself quite wealthy. In the subsequent years Stevens used a fair part of his fortune to invest in local real estate including North Street and other sections of Pittsfield. Part of his holdings included three contiguous parcels between Fenn Street and Cottage Row (now known as Eagle Street) when he died in 1842. His drum making operations and his son Angelo's home were thought to be on this land. With Abner's estate divided amongst his spouse Sophia and subsequently his five children, very little happened with further development for decades.

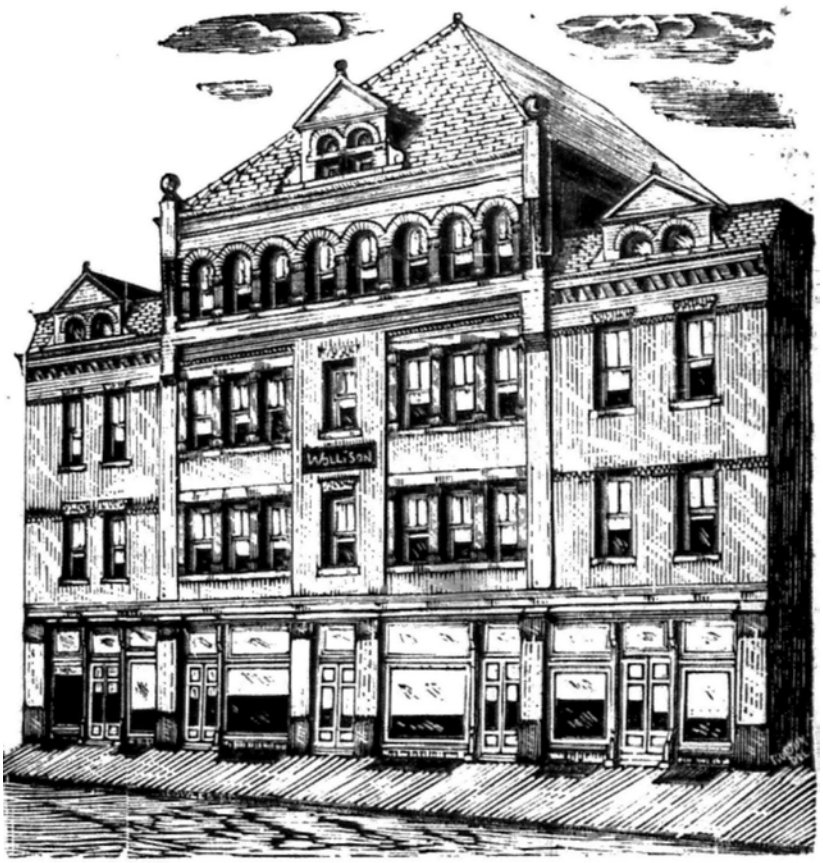
Beginning in the 1870's Abner's youngest child, Mary Helen Stevens (1826-1902), who had married Reuben Draper Wollison (1823-1909, son of George and Maria Royer Wollison) in 1852, began to acquire the various partial interests in her father's property on North Street back from her relatives including heir Angelo's daughter Ella Stevens Keith. By 1876 Mary Helen Stevens Wollison reunited the remaining interests from the original property she did not already control, with herself as the sole owner, and sold the most southern parcel to Rosa England of the England Brothers Department Store family (the first England Brothers building is on part of that parcel. The building now houses Barrington Stage offices, etc.). In what might have been an early declaration of women's suffrage, on the part of the pre-printed deed form where it said "Known By All Men" Mary and Rosa crossed out "Men" and wrote in "People". In 1884 Mary H.S. Wollison acquired property to the east of the North Street parcels running all the way back to Renne Ave. In 1886 the barns on this latest acquisition were moved with an eye toward something big. The razing of Angelo's old house marked the destruction of the last dwelling house from Park Square to Cottage Row, the first two blocks of current downtown Pittsfield.

In the spring of 1887 the Pittsfield Sun reported that Wollison had hired noted local architect H. Neill Wilson to draw up "specifications for the grand new Wollison Block". The paper claimed "the architectural appearance is richer than any block yet built in Pittsfield". Ground broke for the new structure June 16, 1887.

June 16, 1887 Springfield Republican: "It is expected that the demolishing of the old Commercial hotel, which is to give way to the new Wollison block, will be begun this morning. Work will be pushed on the new structure and the builder hopes to finish it by October."

The sketch below is believed to be part of these 1887 preliminary plans. Neill Wilson's later projects would include the renovation of the Red Lion Inn, Stockbridge and Shadowbrook, Lenox which Andrew Carnegie purchased for his summer "cottage". At the time of Carnegie's acquisition Shadowbrook was thought to be the second largest private residence in the United States. Andrew Carnegie passed away there in 1919.

WOLLISON BLOCK, NORTH STREET



Construction continued roughly on schedule with D.C. Munyan in charge of the general carpentry. Other historically significant buildings erected by Munyan include the former Berkshire Athenaeum (now the registry of deeds), Berkshire County Courthouse and the Academy of Music immediately north of the new Wollison Block. The final opening of the new stores and offices ended up delayed several weeks in part because of the Great Blizzard Of 1888. Just before the scheduled opening April 1, 1888, some reports indicate up to five feet of snow fell from March 11 to March 14, 1888. One of the first known photos of the building shows drifts near second story windows.

We celebrate the birthday of the Wollison Block as April 12, 1888, the day the upstairs anchor tenant, the YMCA, held their grand opening. Located on the second floor, the YMCA offered a gym and hot baths for their members, a rarity in those days. Other original upper floor tenants included a large photography studio complete with living quarters and a dress maker. In the retail stores the first tenants included an agricultural supply house, a printer / stationery maker, a rubber goods store and a home furnishings store. By 1890 records indicate the addition of the painting and wallpaper business of Mary and Reuben Wollison's son Herbert, an electric goods distributor, a doctor, dentist, insurance agent and the Sunday Morning Call newspaper. In those days it is thought that several people lived in their offices including S.S. Wheeler who took over the 4th floor photography studio and commissioned the huge sign on the south side of the building, likely painted by Herbert or Reuben Wollison as seen in the 1893 photo below. It could be S.S. Wheeler actually took this picture.

Mary Helen Stevens Wollison died after a short illness on New Year's Day 1902. She left the Wollison Block to her three sons, with a provision that her husband get a stipend from rents of $500 each year. Mary and Reuben lived at 4 and then 58 Union Street. Before the end of that year Herbert sold his share to his brothers who had moved from Pittsfield to practice dentistry years previously. On August 12, 1905 Robert, dentist to Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry, personal dentist (for over 30 years) to the Czar in Russia, sold the building to James Shipton. "The largest real estate deal in Pittsfield in a number of years", "The price being paid about $100,000.00" said the Berkshire Eagle. "The block was built about 18 years ago by Contractor George Foote and is one of the best constructed and finest appearing in the city."

In the 1905 Pittsfield City Directory Herbert Wollison's business is listed as Painter, Wall Paper, Paper Hanger, Artist's Materials, Photo Supplies and Picture Framing, etc. at 148 North Street in the Wollison Bldg. He lived at 18 Maude Street. His father Reuben was listed as a Master House Painter and Paper Hanger.

Herbert S. Wollison entered the paperhanging business with his father when a youth, later spending some two years in a large concern in New York city. While there he attended a trade school, and won the first prize. Returning to Pittsfield he engaged in business for himself in 1889, opening at first a salesroom on the second floor. Business increased to such an extent that better facilities as well as more space became necessary, and he now occupies a store on the ground floor, devoted to interior decorations, shades, pictures, frames, and photographic supplies. During the busy season he gives employment to

about forty men; he has gained a high reputation for completing his work in a thoroughly artistic manner. He is also interested in real estate and has charge of the Wollison block.

Shipton had left Pittsfield for many years to finally return to his roots and join his father-in-law's insurance and real estate firm in 1893. After the purchase of the block Parker and Shipton Insurance moved into the building and James changed the name on the center stone to Shipton.

By 1939 James Shipton built a second building behind the original Wollison Block fronting on Renne Avenue. For many years the anchor, and perhaps the only tenant, stood as the Ben Franklin Press printing company. As not to block delivery entrances to the original edifice, the rear structure featured a tunnel style alley right through the building. In 1946 James Shipton passes away leaving his real estate holdings to his heirs who run his properties including taking out a mortgage on a group of them. By the 1970's the Shipton heirs run into trouble and lose the Shipton building to foreclosure. By this time the rear building lies vacant.

Soon afterwards the new owners experience a fire which damages the original building. By 1986 a new owner had renovated the original structure including adding a new elevator and having the building included on the National Registry Of Historic Places.

Late that year the current owners group took over for the most recent improvements. The rear building, by that time abandoned for many years, became completely rehabilitated with its own elevator. The original Wollison Block and Shipton's second building were then joined as one to create the Wollison-Shipton Building as it is known today. Central air conditioning became a part of all office spaces, a relative rarity for Pittsfield at the time. Many areas of the building which would have been outdoors prior to 1986 retained their original feel with exposed brick, windows and skylights. Occupancy of the Wollison-Shipton building remained very strong over the years including some of 1986 tenants still in place and many others in the building 5 to 10 years or more.

Now comes the next chapter for the Wollison-Shipton Building, the one the new owner will write, as old traditions continue and new ones come to life.

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A fairly comprehensive family tree of the Wollison family (a work in progress) can be downloaded at our website, www.berkshirefamilyhistory.org in a new section of Historical Local Family Trees

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Article ended. Supplemental information follows:

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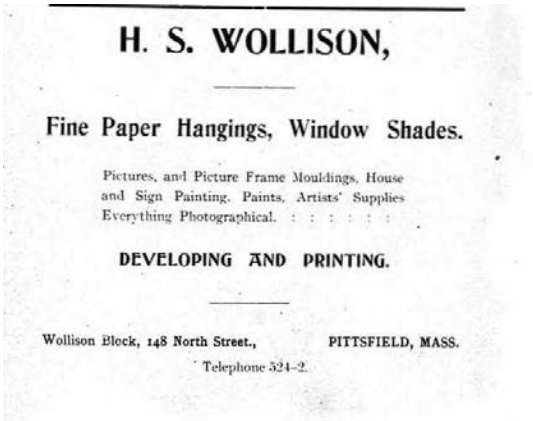
H. S. WOLLISON,
Fine Paper Hangings, Window Shades.
Pictures, and Picture Frame Mouldings, House and Sign Painting. Paints, Artists' Supplies Everything Photographical.
DEVELOPING AND PRINTING.
Wollison Block, 148 North Street., PITTSFIELD, MASS.
Telephone 524-2.

1906 Advertisement

144-156 North Street: Wollison Block 1905 City Directory
144 Kingman Bros.
144 Kingman's Orchestra.
144 Edward J. Spall
148 Herbert S. Wollison
150 Carl Escher
150 John Hancock Life Insurance Co.
150 Conrad Fisher
150 William H. Lyons
George Tucker
Columbian National Life Insurance Co.
150 Mrs. Edith Campbell
George C. Hubbell
Fred S. Smith
Harrington and Company
Dr. F. A. Robinson
154 Grand Union Tea Company
156 Jacob F. Kirchner
Next door:
158-198 Academy of Music

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NEW YORK COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY

THE seventeenth annual commencement of the New York College of Dentistry was held in Checkering Hall, New York, on Tuesday evening, March 6, 1883, at 7.45 o'clock.

The valedictory address was delivered by Henry V. Wollison, D.D.S., of the graduating class, and the address to the graduates by Rev. William M. Taylor, D.D.

The number of matriculates for the session was one hundred and thirty-eight.

BERKSHIRE COUNTY.

PITTSFIELD.

DEATH OF MRS MARY WOLLISON.

Mrs Mary H. S. Wollison, 75, died yesterday morning at 3.45 at her home on Union street after a short illness with pneumonia. Mrs Wollison was born May 6, 1826, being the daughter of Abner and Sophia Stevens, early settlers in Pittsfield, who lived on the site of the Wendell hotel. She was educated in the public schools, and graduated at the old Maplewood institute with high honors. Mrs Wollison was married August, 1852, to Reuben Wollison, and he survives her, besides three sons, Dr Henry Wollison of St Petersburg, Russia, Herbert S. of Pittsfield, and Dr Robert M. Wollison of New York. The deceased was a large property-owner in Pittsfield, and an active member of St Stephen's church. The funeral will be held at her late home Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock, and the body will then be taken to the church, where services will be held at 2.30. Rev Thomas W. Nickerson, Jr., will officiate, and burial will be in the family lot in the Pittsfield cemetery.

A PITTSFIELD BLOCK SOLD.

Wollison Block Sold for About $100,000 to James D. Shipton.

The largest real estate deal in Pittsfield in a number of years was consummated yesterday, the price paid being about $100,000. The property consists of the Wollison business block on the east side of North street, which has a frontage of 83 feet. The land extends back to Renne avenue, a distance of about 200 feet, and a number of frame buildings in the rear of the block are included in the deal. James D. Shipton, a real estate dealer, is the new owner, having bought the property of Dr Henry V. Wollison of St Petersburg, Russia, dentist to the royal family, and Dr Robert M. Wollison of New York. Mr Shipton made the purchase as an investment. The block was built about 18 years ago by Contractor George Foote, and is one of the best constructed and finest appearing in the city.

August 13, 1905

http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Wollison%E2%80%93Shipton_Building
The **Wollison–Shipton Building** is a historic commercial block located at 142-156 North Street in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Designed by architect H. Neil Wilson, it was built in 1888 when the area north of Park Square developed as a commercial and retail part of downtown Pittsfield.

Description and history

The building stands in downtown Pittsfield, on the east side of North Street, roughly midway between Fenn and Eagle Streets. It is a four-story steel and masonry structure, built out of Philadelphia pressed red brick with rusticated brownstone trim. It has a central full-height section, seven bays wide, capped by a hip roof, which has flanking three-story mansarded wings. The ground floor has four storefronts, two on either side of the main building entrance, each now redone with modern plate glass display windows flanking recessed entrances. A belt course of sandstone separates the first and second floors, and brick pilasters

separate the middle seven bays from the outer ones. Windows are rectangular sash, except for the central fourth-floor windows, where eight are set in round-arch openings. Windows in the outermost two bays on each side have stone sills, and are topped by a course of brickwork that extends across the width of the outer sections. In the central sections, the outer windows are grouped in threes, each individually topped by stone sills.[2]

At the time of its construction in 1888, this building was relative rarity for the type of brick used and for its cast iron detailing, which has since been removed. The second floor was the first home for the local YMCA. The architect was H. Neill Wilson, a prominent local architect, and the builder was D.C. Munyan, who was responsible for the construction of a number of other nearby buildings, including the adjacent Academy of Music (burned 1912), the Berkshire County Courthouse, and the Berkshire Athenaeum, both prominent structures on Park Square.[2]

The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 30, 1982,[1] and was included in an expansion of the Park Square Historic District in 1991.[3]

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EX-CZARINA WORKED FOR GERMANY DURING WAR.
TAIHAPE DAILY TIMES, VOLUME XI, ISSUE 3461, 15 APRIL 1920 (New Zealand)

EX-CZARINA WORKED FOR GERMANY DURING WAR.

Dr H. V. Wollison, of New York, was dentist for over thirty years to the family of the late Czar of Russia. For the first time he has conveyed to the public his impressions of the Romanoffs, and although he reveals nothing that is not already well known, he emphasizes the attitude of the unfortunate Czarina in a way that confirms the worst as to her intriguing on behalf of reactionary statesmen in Germany. Dr Wollison is, at the same time, evidently quite fair to the Czarina. “She was,” he states, a far more likeable woman than people who had never seen her and who knew nothing of Russian court life seem to think. It was impossible when one was with her to believe the scandal that was abroad about her relations with Madam Wiraboff and with the monk, Rasputin, whose mistress Madam Wiraboff was Supposed originally to have been.

SENT PILES OF MONEY TO GERMANY.
“To one who met her as I met her she was exceedingly charming, and Madam Wiraboff, for that matter, was a fat, jolly, likable sort of a girl, although rumour had it, and facts substantiated the supposition, that she was one of the greatest intriguantes about the court. The Czarina was German clear through and through. There was no mistaking that, and it was through her that the Germans gained most of their influence at court. She sent untold sums of money into Germany during the war.

Dr Wollison did not entertain at high opinion of the Czarevitch. “He was all mischief,” he declares, although the incident he supplies illustrative of his precocity suggests the jolly rather than the petulant, anemic creature that he is generally supposed to have been.

“Not long before the Czar began his last journey,” Dr Wollison relates, “from general headquarters to Petrograd, he was at headquarters with his father. Several of the generals of the Czar's staff were having luncheon in the garden at headquarters and poring over problems of strategy as they ate, when suddenly a great stream of water struck squarely in the middle of the table and then was plied about the heads and shoulders of members of His Imperial Majesty’s high command. The young Czarevitch had found the garden hose and a faucet to which to attach it, and was making havoc of the luncheon.

“The four daughters of the Czar and Czarina were delightful girls, Olga. was a bit of a blue stocking. Marie was a great German Valkyrie. Tatania was a more quiet, domestic sort and Anastasia was lovely, the very sweetest of them all. It seems a dreadful thing that such a wholesome family of girls should have met so sad a fate. ”The Czar was far too gentle to be a ruler, maintains Dr Wollison. Toward the last of the war Russia was so seeped in German influence that he could find no support for his measures anywhere, and even when he did make suggestions or issue commands they were rarely carried out.

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1899
HERBERT S. WOLLISON,
a well-known merchant and real estate owner in Pittsfield, was born in this city, January 28, 1864. His parents, Reuben D, and Mary (Stevens) Wollison, are still living, and occupy a prominent social position. The father was born in Valley Forge, PA, January 10, 1824, son of George Wollison, a contractor, who resided in Valley Forge for many years, and passed his last days in Pittsfield. The maiden name of George Wollison's wife was Maria Royer.

Reuben D. Wollison learned the paperhanger's trade in his native town, and coming to Pittsfield in 1848, established himself in the painting and interior decorative business, which for nearly forty years he carried on with signal success. Much of his work is still in existence to attest its thoroughness. Having accumulated 2 large amount of property, he retired from active business pursuits in 1887. During the previous year he had completed the Wollison block, eighty-five feet front, one hundred feet deep, and four stories high, which is used fur mercantile and office purposes, and is one of the best business buildings in the city. Reuben D. Wollison married, on August 1, 7852, Mary Stevens, a native of Pittsfield, Her birth took place at the corner of South and West Streets, where the new Wendell House now stands, May 6, 1827. Her father, Abner Stevens, kept a general store, and he also manufactured drums, which he sent to all parts of the world, He acquired a large estate in Pittsfield which fell to his heirs.

Mr. and Mrs. Reuben D. Wollison have reared three children, namely: Henry V.; Herbert S., the subject of this sketch: and Robert M. Henry V. Wollison, who is one of the most noted dentists of the world, left the United States after completing his professional studies, and went abroad, first locating in London and later in Paris. He is now in St, Petersburg, Russia, where he has one of the

best equipped offices and laboratories in the world, and he holds the appointment of honorably dentist to their Imperial Majesties, the Czar and Czarina of Russia. Robert M. Wollison won distinction in college previous to his majority by passing an unusually high examination. He received his diploma at the age of twenty-one years, and is now one of the most successful dental practitioners in New York City.

Herbert S. Wollison entered the paperhanging business with his father when a youth, later spending some two years in a large concern in New York City. While there he attended a trade school, and won the first prize. Returning to Pittsfield, he engaged in business for himself in 1889, opening at first a salesroom on the second floor. Business increased to such an extent that better facilities as well as more space became absolutely necessary, and he now occupies a store on the ground floor devoted to interior decorations, shades, mattings, pictures, frames, and so forth. During the busy season he gives employment to about forty men; he has gained a high reputation for completing his work in a thoroughly artistic manner. He is also interested in real estate, and has charge of the Wollison Block.

Mr. Wollison is a Freemason, being a Past Master of Mystic Lodge, and has occupied important chairs in Berkshire Chapter and Berkshire Commandery, No. 22, Knights Templar, and Berkshire Council Royal and Select Masters. He also belongs to the local Council of the Royal Arcanum. He attends St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and has been a vestryman for several years. Mr. Wollison married, October 25, 1898, Miss Minnie Strait Beers, of Pittsfield, Mass., daughter of the late Elijah and Martha (Strait) Beers, of this city, formerly of New Lebanon, N.Y.

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I hope you enjoyed this history!
I'm sure there is more to the story!
Clark W. Nicholls
Last edited:
Friday, April 3, 2026